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Domestic Violence NSW Report Highlights Impacts of COVID Lockdown on Domestic and Family Violence Services

Domestic Violence NSW (DVNSW) has released a report outlining the impact of the 2021 Greater Sydney COVID-19 lockdown on specialist domestic and family violence services and the women and children who need them.

The report also provides clear 13 recommendations on how the NSW Government can respond, including recommending the creation of a whole-of-government plan to meet the increased demand for domestic and family violence services after lockdown is lifted.

Key findings include:

- 73% of services faced a significant increase in demand
- 84% of services said there was an increase in the complexity of the situations for the clients referred
- Of the 33 services operating waitlists, there had been an increase in the length of the waitlist of almost half of the services at 48.5%.

‘These figures are incredibly worrying’, says CEO of DVNSW Delia Donovan. ‘Funding granted during the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak was welcomed but has now ceased for many services, and as a result they’ve faced the loss of staff and resources. The lack of long-term funding makes the increase in demand difficult, especially in regional and rural areas.

‘We need additional funding for services so they can support clients under the challenging circumstances of this pandemic.’

Concerningly, 15 services noted that there had been a decrease in demand for service indicating that in some areas people are finding it difficult to access support, especially during lockdown. DVNSW also noted the increased stress on the mental health of people experiencing domestic and family violence due to the COVID19 pandemic.

There has also been a large concern for the wellbeing of children, with Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) reports reducing during the lockdown period. “Specialist domestic and family violence services need support, training and resources to ensure they are continuing to practice in a child-safe manner,” says Ms Donovan.

Acting CEO of Muslim Women Australia Nemat Kharboutli says the most recent lockdowns has seen increased pressures and complexities in supporting women and children escaping violence.

'It has stretched resources and taken a toll on the workforce', she says. 'We are working around the clock to ensure CALD women, families and communities are receiving up-to-date messaging, are safe from both a DFV and health perspective, and know support is available.'

No to Violence's Chief Executive Officer Jacqui Watt says lockdown can be a dangerous time for many in abusive relationships, and encouraged men concerned about their behaviour to reach out for support.

"Lockdown can be a period where emotions and feelings are more intense. But that is no excuse for family violence. However, you can do something about this. Support is available."

Ms Watt acknowledged research across last year found that the frequency and intensity of domestic and family violence increased during periods of lockdowns.

"Lockdowns are not an excuse to delay getting support. You can reach out for support by calling the Men's Referral Service on 1300 766 491. We are there to support you to take these first steps."

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Media Contact

Caitlin Morahan, Media & Communications Manager Domestic Violence NSW: 0466 813 124

Domestic Violence NSW is the peak body for specialist domestic and family violence services in NSW.

DVNSW provides a representative and advocacy function for specialist services and the women, families and communities they support. Their mission is to eliminate domestic and family violence through leadership in policy, advocacy, partnerships and the promotion of best practice.

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence help can be found via:

- **1800RESPECT** or 1800 737 732 which offers a national counselling helpline, information and support
- **NSW Domestic Violence Line** 1800 65 64 63 which offers a state-wide counselling helpline, information and support
- **Men's Referral Service** 1300 766 491 for men, or friends and family of men using violence